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## **How will the supply of Whitebark Pine Nuts affect Grizzlies in Yellowstone?**

The year 2000 resulted in a lower-than-average whitebark pine cone crop in the Yellowstone ecosystem. While whitebark pine cone seeds (also called pine nuts) provide a favorite grizzly bear food in the Yellowstone area, there are plenty of other food sources available to sustain this growing population.

- Whitebark pine nuts are only one of the main food sources for Yellowstone grizzly bears. Besides grasses and forbs, roots and tubers, and berries, other important foods for this population of bears are army cutworm moths, native cutthroat trout, and carcasses of elk and other game animals.
- Although there are fewer whitebark pine nuts available from this year's growth, an abundant supply of last year's crop still remains on the ground. Yellowstone grizzlies have been observed eating last year's nuts, even when new nuts are available.
- Grizzly bears are very adaptable and opportunistic; they will eat whatever foods are available. It is common for the availability of various food sources to vary from year to year, and during the season, depending on environmental conditions.
- The supply of whitebark pine cones is normally variable from year to year. In years when this preferred food is scarce or non-existent, the bears rely more on other food sources and travel more widely in search of alternate foods. Thus, it is even more important in years of low whitebark production to minimize bear attractants and avoid conflicts.

Because conditions this year have been dry with reduced vegetation growth in general, residents and visitors to the Yellowstone area need to be aware that more bears may be moving from the high country to lower elevations this fall, in search of food before hibernation. It is especially important now that humans practice bear-safe sanitation and storage of odorous items, to avoid attracting bears.

### **What is being done about possible shortages of grizzly foods?**

- Research and work is being done by the USDA Forest Service to improve the genetic adaptability of the whitebark pine in response to blister rust, the major threat to whitebark pine survival. Seedlings of more resistant strains of whitebark pine are already being planted.
- Shortages of food sources occur from time to time in local areas; at these times, bears must cover more ground to obtain the calories they need. A lower production of whitebark pine nuts, for example, may lead to more frequent encounters with humans in and around the Yellowstone ecosystem.
- A major part of the Yellowstone Grizzly Recovery Plan, which will continue with the Conservation Strategy once the population is recovered, is monitoring of major food sources.